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SUBJECT: EMBASSY ACTIVITIES MARKING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
AND U.N. ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy Yerevan marked International Human Rights Day by presenting an investigative journalist an award, and United Nations Anti-Corruption Day by highlighting ongoing efforts to increase transparency and limit graft. Prime Minister Sargsian continues to champion reform, yet struggles to gain traction for his agenda. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On December 10 Post hosted a reception to celebrate International Human Rights Day and to honor investigative journalist Edik Baghdasaryan with Post's second annual Armenian Freedom Defender Award. A critical mass of journalists, government officials (including the Minister of Justice, Prosecutor General, and the Ombudsman), and opposition and civil society representatives attended the reception.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador's congratulatory remarks highlighted the need for constructive engagement with the authorities and steady pressure for incremental change. Her remarks were followed by Baghdasarian's tough critique of the authorities and the justice system. Baghdasarian especially highlighted Armenia's alarming poverty rates, child malnutrition, fraudulent elections and persecution of persons for their political views. TV stations had decent coverage of the event in their evening news, but there were few articles in the print press. (Comment: Newspapers may have been reluctant to praise the editor of a competing newspaper. End comment).

¶4. (U) On December 9, USAID's anti-corruption implementer Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity (MAAC), together with OSCE Yerevan and the Prosecutor General's Office, organized Armenia's sixth anti-corruption forum dedicated to the United Nations Anti-Corruption Day. The Ambassador, Prime Minister, the Prosecutor General, and representatives of the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, and European Commission made opening remarks.

¶5. (U) Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian described corruption as a disease that should be fought at three levels: among top officials, through structural changes in public administration, and by reducing societal tolerance of corruption. The speech constituted a brief presentation of the main points of the GOAM Anti-Corruption Strategy 2009-2012 approved October 6, 2009.

¶6. (U) MAAC also presented "The Armenia Corruption Survey of Households 2009," which it funded. The survey showed a slight worsening of the overall situation since 2008, which corresponded to Transparency International's 2009 corruption perception index released on November 17. On that index, Armenia dropped 11 spots from last year and now ranks 120th in the world.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: There are reformers within the Armenian government on both human rights and corruption, with the Prime Minister the most visible and articulate of the progressives. While Post continues to engage such leaders and to seek out other would-be

reformers, and works to soften hard-liners within the GOAM, part of our challenge has been in convincing local civic society to opt for persistent, sometimes unsatisfying engagement over detached indignation. We will continue to use such events to press our cause.

YOVANOVITCH